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Editor's Page

## CIA: an All-Purpose Football

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For a long time now, it has been fashionable to take swipes at the Central Intelligence Agency. We believe people are getting fed up with this continuing effort to belittle, if not to destroy, the CIA.

Few would deny that a healthy dose of past criticism of the Agency was deserved—criticism of illegal spying on Americans at home, of drug experiments on unwitting human guinea pigs and of a number of distasteful operations abroad, including plots to murder foreign leaders.

Exhaustive investigations by the Executive and Congress laid bare those and other excesses. The investigations also disclosed that the main responsibility for most of the wrongdoing lay not with the officials directing the CIA. This is underlined in a report by Senator Daniel Inouye, outgoing chairman of the Senate Select Committee. In his words: "In almost every instance, the abuses that have been revealed were a result of direction from above, including Presidents and Secretaries of State."

Senator Inouye's verdict about the CIA today: "The intelligence agencies of the United States are now functioning under strict guidelines. . . . It is my evaluation that the present quality of the work of the United States intelligence community is good and shows every sign of becoming better."

That is gratifying to learn, for it should be evident to all that the United States would stand naked in this world if it didn't have the information-gathering arm of the CIA to try to tell us as much about the Russians as they know about us.

Still, the drumfire of denigration continues. The latest attacks take two forms.

One is the publication of a book by a young former CIA analyst in Vietnam charging massive bungling of the final frantic evacuation of Saigon in 1973. In writing the book, the author violated a written oath not

to divulge any secrets learned during his work with the CIA. Some of what is in the book, we understand, is misleading and sensationalized.

The second current attack against the CIA involves a decision to discharge 816 officials of the Directorate of Operations—the department responsible for dirty tricks as well as for secret collection of intelligence.

Critics have launched a fusillade at CIA Director Turner, charging that the action is unfair to the hundreds of dedicated agents who are being fired and that it threatens to damage essential espionage.

Many of these same critics, a few months ago, were leading the attack on the CIA for the covert operations conducted by the very officials who are being let out. They seem disinclined to make what is the most important point about the retrenchment in the size of the "department of dirty tricks"—namely, that it is part of a far-reaching reform designed to meet the very criticism that today's detractors were leveling against the Agency.

Turner's reorganization seeks to strengthen the CIA's analysis activities. Undigested or poorly analyzed information—no matter how great the volume—is valueless. His is also an effort to tighten a system that willy-nilly has allowed spies and spy satellites to collect masses of largely useless intelligence.

In carrying out his reforms, Admiral Turner apparently has been guilty of ineptitude—and even callousness—in the impersonal manner in which he dismissed hundreds of officers. However much he may be faulted for his tactics, the Director clearly is moving to fashion the responsible and effective intelligence community that the Congress and the nation demand.

Cheap-shot criticism and the defense of agents who deliberately flout their oath of secrecy may make spicy reading—but they are stretching the limits of fair play and contribute nothing to the nation's security.